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SUBJECT: THE SECRETARY'S APRIL 7 MEETING WITH ARGENTINE FM
TAIANA

REF: (A) BUENOS AIRES 0226 (B) BUENOS AIRES 0158 (C)
BUENOS AIRES 0375 (D) BUENOS AIRES 0335 (E)
BUENOS AIRES 0350

Classified By: Ambassador E. Anthony Wayne for reasons 1.4 (b) & (d).

¶1. (C) Your April 7 meeting with Argentine FM Jorge Taiana is an opportunity to encourage his continued support in keeping the overall tone of relations positive, even in the face of occasional disagreements. As populist and liberal democratic models vie in South America, Argentina is a swing state, with a foot in both camps. A top objective has been to keep Argentina out of the populist camp. It possesses talent, resources, and potential influence in the region. We have found engagement is the best way to persuade Argentina to act as a responsible partner. Argentina consistently registers the highest levels of anti-Americanism in the hemisphere. President Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner (CFK) and her husband have used anti-U.S. rhetoric to boost ratings at home and have displayed a thin skin to perceived criticism and a tendency to sense conspiracy where none exists. We have sought to reach out directly to the Argentine public and media to present a positive view of the United States while working with Taiana and others to establish a firm foundation for bilateral cooperation with the GOA. With President Obama's approval rating in Argentina far higher than that of most local politicians, Argentines from CFK on down are scrambling to be seen as our friends. This sea-change in attitudes offers the USG an opportunity to improve substantially the bilateral relationship with Argentina and to reduce anti-American sentiment among the public.

¶2. (C) Taiana is a skilled diplomat who has navigated the treacherous waters of Peronist politics as Foreign Minister since 2005 to both CFK and her predecessor (and husband) Nestor Kirchner. He supports stronger bilateral ties and has worked to improve cooperation in areas perceived as important to us, supporting democracy and human rights, UN peacekeeping missions, non-proliferation, counterterrorism, and counternarcotics, as well as to maneuver through moments when CFK and her husband have been upset with perceived U.S. missteps. The president, her husband, and Taiana share a leftist worldview forged in the struggle against the last Argentine military dictatorship, but Taiana for years lived in Washington. Prone to conspiracy theories, the Kirchners often view events through a nationalist, statist prism, and voice suspicions of many aspects of U.S. policy. While criticizing certain U.S. targets (especially the Bush Administration, Wall Street, the 'Washington Consensus' and excessive U.S. deregulation, which they blame for the hard times befalling Argentina), CFK has also repeatedly indicated a desire for closer bilateral relations with the Obama administration. (She was also an early supporter of then-candidate Clinton.) Your meeting with Taiana can establish a solid basis for a bilateral work agenda whose substance can get us through any ups and downs.

¶3. (C) Despite rocky patches in our bilateral relationship (such as the "suitcase scandal," during which CFK overreacted to perceived USG allegations of illicit campaign financing from Venezuela), Argentina cooperates in regional security, counter-terrorism, drug interdiction, nonproliferation, and U.N. peacekeeping missions. Argentina was awarded Major

Non-NATO Ally status during the Clinton Administration. The GOA is often a cooperative partner in multilateral fora, including in democracy and human rights. Argentina is a transshipment and destination point for narcotics and precursor chemicals, and GOA law enforcement agencies cooperate closely with their USG counterparts. Argentina was a victim of international terrorist attacks in the 1990s and is a cooperative partner in countering terrorism. Although political and working-level relations between the GOA and USG are positive, GOA officials react very negatively to perceived affronts to their sovereignty, often winning public support for these reactions.

¶4. (C) The GOA's extreme sensitivity to any public criticism poses a problem for the USG, which releases a number of Congressionally mandated reports about Argentina and other foreign countries on a broad range of issues. (The April 1 release of our perennial Investment Climate Statement, which covers the foreign investment climate here, for example, generated concern within the GOA despite its extremely understated tone. We are working to assuage their unease through private conversations and publicly putting the report in its proper context.)

Bilateral Engagement

¶5. (C) The GOA is very pleased and encouraged by recent contacts: G-20 collaboration in London and earlier, CFK's March 27 meeting with Vice President Biden in Chile, and the letters and phone calls from President Obama. (Argentine media on April 3 gave prominent coverage to President Obama's letter of condolence on the death of former president Raul Alfonsin, a key figure in Argentina's 1983 return to democracy and an emblematic human rights leader.) We expect FM Taiana will be prepared to engage with you on the need to build on positive momentum in the bilateral relationship, as well as G-20 follow-up and preparations for the Summit of the Americas.

¶6. (C) In July 2008, we reactivated the "Special Process of Regular High-Level Bilateral Consultations" that had been established in 1998 by Secretary Albright and then-FM Guido Di Tella. Using that framework to draw attention to our commitment to explore new areas of cooperation, we met here and signed agreements for cooperation in alternative energy, nanotechnology, national parks, and cultural exchanges. WHA A/S Shannon met in February with Vice Foreign Minister Taccetti to discuss a follow-on meeting in Washington for later this year. Your meeting would be a good opportunity to obtain an agreement to continue with these useful consultations.

G-20 Follow-up

¶7. (C) The MFA said Taiana will be interested in getting your views on G-20 follow-up. The MFA is particularly eager to fend off criticism that the G-20 is exclusively focused on financial and economic problems by highlighting G-20 efforts to boost social inclusiveness.

Summit of the Americas (SOA)

¶8. (C) FM Taiana and other MFA officials have repeatedly told us they want to work with the U.S. to make the SOA a success. At the April 17-19 SOA, the GOA hopes President Obama will share his vision for how the region can work together to make progress on shared goals. In that connection, MFA sources stressed to us that "any positive gesture by the USG to any country in the region will have a multiplying effect." They stressed that they were encouraged by President Obama's efforts to reach out to Iran, and that similar gestures of openness in this region would be well-received.

Malvinas/Falklands

¶9. (C) In their ongoing campaign seeking recognition of Argentine claims to sovereignty over the Malvinas/Falkland Islands, the GOA is seeking to put this issue on the agenda for the SOA. The United States recognizes de facto UK administration of the islands but takes no position regarding the sovereignty claims of either party. We do not believe it is an appropriate issue for leaders to address at the SOA, but the GOA is likely to press the issue. April 2 was the 27th anniversary of the Argentine invasion of the islands. CFK, in London for the G-20 Summit, delivered a speech reiterating Argentina's "inalienable" claim to sovereignty and asking that relevant UN resolutions calling for negotiations be implemented. A couple of days earlier, at a summit meeting in Doha of Arab and South American leaders, she had managed to obtain support in that summit declaration for the Argentine position. A working-level MFA official confided that Taiana may seek to use this meeting to enlist your support for GOA efforts to add this issue to the SOA agenda.

Other Issues

¶10. (C) As you may see in your briefing papers, we are looking to Taiana to be helpful in finding a mutually acceptable solution to the Minister of Defense's request for our Military Group to move out of its office space in the Argentine Ministry of Defense headquarters (ref C). Another issue you should be aware of, even if it is not yet ready to be aired with Taiana, is that there is concern in Argentina that a GOA proposal for new broadcast legislation (refs D and E) may, if it is approved as currently drafted, have detrimental implications for freedom of expression in Argentina.

WAYNE